

Utah's Plan Of Action To Promote Oral Health

A Public-Private Partnership

Utah Oral Health Coalition 2004

Utah's Plan of Action to Promote Oral Health is designed to promote oral health and prevent disease, especially to reduce the health disparities that affect low-income or uninsured people, those who are geographically isolated, members of racial and ethnic groups, and others who are vulnerable because of special health care needs. It reflects the Utah Oral Health Coalition's vision, goals, and a series of actions to achieve the goals.

There is an integral relationship between oral health and general health, including associations between chronic oral infections and diabetes, osteoporosis, heart and lung conditions, and certain adverse pregnancy outcomes. Oral diseases affect our ability to eat, the foods we choose, how we feel about ourselves, how we look, and the way we communicate. These diseases can affect economic productivity and compromise our ability to work at home, at school, or on the job.

Vision and Goals

The Vision of the *Plan of Action* is to advance the general health and well-being of all Utahns by promoting oral health and preventing oral disease.

The Goals of the *Plan of Action*, reflecting those of the *National Call to Action* and *HP 2010*, are to promote oral health, to improve quality of life, to improve access to care by overcoming barriers, and to eliminate oral health disparities.

Action 1. Strengthen the Perception of the Importance of Oral Health

For too long, the perception that oral health is in some way less important than and separate from general health has been deeply ingrained in people's consciousness. Implementation strategies include:

- Change public perceptions
- Change policymakers' perceptions
- Change health care providers' perceptions

Action 2. Overcome Barriers to Improve Oral Health

Implementation strategies to overcome barriers to oral health need to engage all groups, particularly those most vulnerable, in the development of oral health care programs. These work to eliminate health disparities and aim to overcome barriers by:

- Replicating proven preventive measures
- Improving access to oral health care
- Enhancing health promotion

Action 3. Build the Science Base and Accelerate Science Transfer

Implementation strategies to build a balanced science base and accelerate science transfer should benefit all individuals, especially those in poorest oral health or at greatest risk. Specifically there is a need to:

- Enhance applied research to improve oral health and prevent disease
- Accelerate the effective transfer of science into public health and private practice

Action 4. Build an Effective Infrastructure

A sustained effort is needed to build the state's oral health infrastructure to ensure that all sectors of society have sufficient knowledge, expertise, and resources to design, implement, and monitor oral health programs. Efforts to build infrastructure include:

- Enhance opportunities for providers.
- Increase the community-based experiences that benefit the communities and the dental health care providers.
- Expand continuing education opportunities for professionals in the arena of public dental health
- Expand oral health workforce capacity.
- Enhance flexibility and develop local solutions.
- Increase diversity, capacity, and flexibility to all components of the workforce.
- Ensure a sufficient workforce distribution to meet health care needs
- Secure an adequate and flexible workforce

Action 5. Increase Collaborations

The private sector, such as business, dentists and others, and the public sector, such as advocacy groups, volunteers, government and others, have unique characteristics and strengths that are necessary for collaboration to be successful. Linking the two can result in a creative synergy capitalizing on the talents and resources of each partner. Efforts are needed within each sector to increase the capacity for program development, for building partnerships, and for leveraging programs. Most importantly, successful partnerships result when the public in the form of voluntary organizations, community groups, or as individuals are included in any partnership that addresses oral and general health.